Applecross Primary School Nursery
Day Care of Children

Applecross Primary School Nursery
Applecross
Strathcarron
IV54 8LU

Telephone: 01520 744 325

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
21 June 2023

Service provided by:
Highland Council

Service provider number:
SP2003001693

Service no:
CS2003017165

About the service

Applecross Primary School Nursery is based within Applecross Primary School, just outside the village of Applecross, within the Kyle and Lochalsh area of the Highlands. The indoor nursery accommodation comprises of a main classroom, adjacent toilets and access to the general purpose room. The service operates on a mainly outdoor basis, with children having unlimited access to a dedicated, large, natural, outside play area, temporary toilet area and a small polytunnel for shelter.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 10 children at any one time aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school. The service is provided by Highland Council and managed by the primary school head teacher as part of a cluster school group.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced which took place on 19 June 2023. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with children using the service and one of their families;
- reviewed online questionnaire feedback from three families;
- spoke with staff and management;
- observed practice and children's experiences; and
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches from all staff within the service which supported them to feel safe, secure and happy.
- Opportunities for children's play and learning were enhanced by strong connections to the local community.
- The implementation of a responsive planning approach is in the early stages and the service would benefit from a review of how the approach is working to effectively meet children's needs.
- Children benefitted from all day access to outdoor play opportunities which enabled them to have choice, direct their own play and supported them to be active and healthy.
- Quality assurance processes were in place to ensure aspects of the service were routinely monitored.
- The staff team worked very well together to ensure positive outcomes for children.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	4 - Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning? 4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children experienced warm, caring and nurturing approaches from all staff within the service, which supported them to feel safe, happy and secure. Strong trusting relationships were evident between children and staff, and we observed staff sensitively listening and responding to children at appropriate times, offering comfort and reassurance when needed. This supported children's well-being and helped them to feel valued and included. Children's personal care needs were carried out in a respectful way and fostered opportunities for children to be independent. For example, children were encouraged to make their own choice to use midge repellent and were supported to apply this themselves. As a result, children were confident to make decisions which reflected their own personal preferences.

Staff spoke confidently and knowledgeably about the individual care needs of children and effectively implemented strategies to support their development and progress. Personal plans sampled had been reviewed with families to support consistency of care. As a result, children received well-planned care and support to meet their individual needs. Some personal planning information was not up to date, which had the potential to impact the ability to effectively review and update children's current needs. We reminded the manager and staff to ensure that personal plans were fully completed and contained the most up to date information for children. The previous inspection identified an area for improvement related to personal planning which has now been met.

Snack time was a positive, relaxing, and sociable time for children where they were provided with opportunities to develop their independence. Children helped to prepare and serve the snack fruit items, they spread their own butter and cleared away their own plates and dishes. As a result, children had opportunities to take responsibility and learn key life skills. At snack and lunchtimes, staff sat with children which provided opportunities to promote close attachments and develop language skills. Food choices at both snack and lunchtime were nutritious and children had access to fresh water throughout the day to support hydration. However, at lunchtime, the environment did not always support opportunities for children to take responsibility and be independent. We discussed with the manager how they could further develop the lunchtime experience to offer more opportunities for children to develop their independence skills. For example, serving their own meal accompaniments and collecting and clearing their own plates. We signposted the Care Inspectorate best practice note: 'Keeping children safe: supporting positive mealtime experiences in early learning and childcare (ELC)' to support the service with the development of their lunchtime experience.

There were effective systems in place to record and share accidents and incidents. We reminded the manager to review, with the staff team, instances where the recording of accidents and incidents should take place. We also signposted best practice guidance 'Records that all registered care services (except childminding) must keep and guidance on notification reporting' to ensure any necessary related notifications are shared with the Care Inspectorate at the appropriate times.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their own play and learning through a balance of spontaneous and planned play experiences which were fun and interesting and offered opportunities for children to investigate and be creative. Staff followed the children's interests and scaffolded learning opportunities around these. For example, a recent interest in colours had been noticed and observed by staff. Provocations were provided to encourage children to explore, create and investigate primary colours and colour mixing. Children commented: "If red's in there it makes purple", "Orange you need red and yellow", "Mine is turning purple!" and "I used the funnel to pour the water in". This successfully captured children's imagination and enriched their play and learning experiences.

Children were engaged in their play and learning throughout the day and play experiences supported children's development in language, literacy and numeracy. For example, during play with powder paints staff encouraged children to explore shape and symmetry, helping them to develop an understanding of this within a familiar context. One child commented: "I've made my own butterfly!". While sharing familiar stories together, staff encouraged children to make predictions and express their thoughts, feelings and opinions which enhanced children's enjoyment and engagement with texts. These experiences supported children to develop key language, literacy and numeracy skills through play.

Opportunities for children's play and learning were enhanced through strong connections to the local community. Children had established a link with a local community garden and made regular visits to learn about planting and growing. Children had grown their own strawberries and mint and planted acorn and hazel trees to support the work of the local tree nursery. One parent commented: "We also appreciate the links that are created by the nursery children regularly visiting the local community garden and tree nursery." This enabled children to develop their understanding of their community, sense of place and contribute to the sustainability of their local environment.

The refreshed approach to planning within the service was child centred and responsive to children's interests and life experiences. Staff commented this was working well and felt it was more responsive to the children's needs. However, staff were still in the early stages of implementing this and as a result, the recording of key learning and meaningful next steps for children was not yet consistent across all planning information. Observations of children's individual development and learning were recorded and shared with families through profile folders. Most observations highlighted children's learning through the early level curriculum and included some next steps for development. The service had identified the need to set out clear expectations for staff around the regular and effective recording of observations. This included building staff confidence to identify and plan next steps in learning for children, so they are sufficiently challenged at an appropriate level. The previous inspection identified an area for improvement related to the development of planning approaches and quality observations which will remain in place.

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality Indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

The indoor and outdoor nursery spaces were clean, comfortable and welcoming for children and families. Recent improvements to the resources and equipment within the outdoor spaces helped to ensure that play areas were well maintained. For example, broken and damaged resources had been removed and the storage of loose parts had been changed to improve safety as well as children's access to materials to support play and learning. This ensured children were supported to enjoy challenging and fun play experiences in an environment which was safe.

Children benefitted from play experiences within a developmentally appropriate environment which promoted their curiosity and imagination. The outdoor space provided a variety of loose parts and natural materials which children enjoyed investigating and exploring together. For example, children noticed colours within the natural environment outdoors which prompted staff to extend learning for children around blaeberries and calendula plants. Children then used some of these natural resources within their play experiences. We discussed with the service the need to review and develop the outside space further. This included reviewing the location of some resources such as the mud kitchen to make accessibility easier for children and provide further opportunities to create inviting, engaging and purposeful spaces for play and learning.

Children could access the polytunnel space outdoors which provided shelter from the weather and opportunities to play in a covered area. The layout and size of the polytunnel provided some challenges in terms of available space and resources. For example, it was difficult to provide a full range of play resources within the small space. However, staff stored additional resources in an accessible shed and provided these for children as they requested them throughout the day.

The outdoor polytunnel area provided space for children to rest and relax which supported their emotional needs. Staff and children also used this area for reading and sharing stories together. We observed nurturing attachments between staff and children during these experiences. This supported children's language development as well as their sense of well-being within the nursery.

Children benefitted from all day access to outdoor play opportunities which enabled them to have choice, direct their own play and supported them to be active and healthy. Outdoors, there were opportunities for children to take part in more physical play experiences. Areas to climb, run and explore provided opportunities for children to have fun and develop their movement and coordination skills.

We were satisfied that the service had appropriate infection control procedures in place to minimise the potential spread of infection. We observed children being supported to understand the need for good hygiene and hand washing at necessary times. Risk assessments were in place and implemented effectively by staff to ensure that the environment was safe for the children attending. For example, the outdoor space shared with the school and community was checked by staff before children could enter it. This ensured children experienced care in an environment which was safe. The previous inspection identified a requirement related to children experiencing care in an appropriate and safe environment which has now been met.

The current nappy changing facilities do not support effective infection prevention and control or children's dignity. Nappy changing currently takes place on a mat on the floor in a toilet area. This potentially increases the risk of the spread of infection and does not currently meet best practice guidance reflected in 'Space to Grow' and 'Nappy changing facilities for early learning and childcare services: information to support improvement'. The previous inspection identified a requirement related to children being supported to receive effective personal care which has now been met. However, a new area for improvement has been included to address the unsuitable nappy changing facilities (see area for improvement 1).

Areas for improvement

1. To ensure children receiving personal care are effectively supported, the provider should, at a minimum, ensure:

a) personal care routines promote children's privacy and dignity; and
b) effective infection prevention and control practices are in place.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'If I require intimate personal care, this is carried out in a dignified way, with my privacy and personal preferences respected.' (HSCS 1.4); and
'If I require intimate personal care, there is a suitable area for this, including a sink if needed.' (HSCS 5.4).

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The manager recognised the need to review the current service vision, values and aims to reflect the aspirations of their children, families, partners and the wider community. This review had started to be implemented to help the service identify, and understand more fully, what is important for children and their families as the service moves forward.

The views of children and families were actively sought by the service to inform the development of the setting. Through termly questionnaires and regular stay and play sessions, families have had the opportunity to feedback ideas towards the development of the service. This has included providing ideas for the renewed vision, values and aims as well as providing feedback on changes to the reviewed planning approaches. As well as this, families have provided support with practical work to develop aspects of the outdoor space. This has included tree planting as well as supporting the service to purchase and build the polytunnel. Regular communication with families also took place through a variety of methods including email, a private social media group and face to face discussions. This supported families to feel included and respected as partners in their children's development and learning.

Quality assurance processes were in place to ensure aspects of the service were routinely monitored. An improvement plan had been developed which identified key areas for change. Good progress had been made in addressing actions within the improvement plan to support positive outcomes for children and families. This included improving the safety of the outdoor play space as well as the personal planning approaches within the service. Regular monitoring of staff practice linked to the service improvement priorities was being effectively implemented by the manager. Monitoring of children's profiles and children's play experiences had taken place. Constructive feedback had been given to staff to highlight areas of strength and aspects of their practice which could be further developed. As a result, staff received professional learning opportunities to develop the quality of their interactions with children. This supported the development of reflective practice and improvement within the service and promoted positive outcomes for children. We discussed with the manager the need to continue to embed and develop quality assurance processes to ensure other identified areas for development, such as the planning approaches, are reviewed and improved. The previous inspection identified an area for improvement related to quality assurance which has now been met.

Regular staff meetings and visits to nursery from the manager were supporting effective self-evaluation. The service had used best practice guidance to implement changes and review aspects of provision together which had included implementing new planning approaches and new risk assessment procedures. They were currently in the process of reviewing the impact of these changes and planning next steps. Staff were encouraged to be part of the service development, contribute ideas and reflect on their practice together. Opportunities to look outwards and reflect on practice with colleagues from other settings provided staff with valuable time for professional dialogue and peer support. This demonstrated the commitment of staff to the ongoing development of the service and improving outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

The staff were caring and nurturing and committed to providing a positive experience for all children. They were warm and friendly in their approach which promoted a happy and inclusive environment where children could follow their interests, play and have fun. Families commented: "Staff are friendly, flexible and helpful" and "Friendly staff that have time to connect and get to know children and their families well. The outdoor area gives my child space to grow and learn, with a focus on caring for their environment."

The importance of ensuring the service was appropriately staffed was recognised by the manager as essential to the well-being of children. As a result, the service was very well staffed to meet adult-child ratios and the staff team effectively supervised and supported children's play and learning at all times. This included busier times of the day such as lunchtimes and when the school children joined the nursery for morning break. The staff team communicated well with each other when a task took them away from their designated area. They informed each other when leaving an area or when attending to a child's needs. This ensured children's experiences across the day were positive and they were kept safe.

At lunchtime, staff breaks were well planned to minimise impact on the children whilst enabling staff to rest and be refreshed. Continuity of care for children was consistent throughout the day with minimal changes to staffing. This ensured positive transitions for children and very good communication with families at pick up and drop off times.

Children benefitted from regular visits to Applecross community garden as well as joint play sessions with children from a neighbouring nursery. Staff were flexible in the change of routine at these times and worked very well together to ensure effective supervision and quality engagement with children. As a result, children were provided with enhanced social experiences and opportunities to be meaningfully connected to their local community.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 31 January 2023, the provider must ensure children receiving personal care are effectively supported. To do this, the provider must, at a minimum ensure:

a) personal care routines promote children's privacy and dignity; and
b) effective infection prevention and control practices are in place.

This is to comply with Regulation 4 (1)(b) Welfare of Users of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011(SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'If I require intimate personal care, this is carried out in a dignified way, with my privacy and personal preferences respected' (HSCS 1.4).

This requirement was made on 24 October 2022.

Action taken on previous requirement

Facilities to support personal care routines outdoors have been developed to ensure children's privacy and dignity are upheld. Since the last inspection, the service had added a covering to the outdoor toilet which was effective in providing privacy for children.

The current nappy changing facilities do not support effective infection prevention and control or children's dignity. Nappy changing currently takes place on a mat on the floor in a toilet area. This potentially increases the risk of the spread of infection and does not currently meet best practice guidance reflected in 'Space to Grow' and 'Nappy changing facilities for early learning and childcare services: information to support improvement' (see area for improvement 1 in 2.2).

Children now have access to warm water to wash their hands at the outdoor toilet and within the outdoor polytunnel areas. This ensured there were effective handwashing facilities throughout the outdoor and indoor spaces. Children were also supported to wash their hands at appropriate times which supported effective infection prevention and control practices.

This requirement has been met. However, a new area for improvement has been added to address the unsuitable nappy changing facilities.

Met - outwith timescales

Requirement 2

By 31 January 2023, the provider must ensure that children experience care in an appropriate and safe environment. At a minimum, the provider must ensure that:

a) the outdoor play areas used are safe and secure;
b) staff are confident and competent in assessing and addressing risks;
c) risk assessments are up to date and take account of children's individual needs; and
d) staff understand and effectively implement the risk assessments that are in place.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (Welfare of users) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I make informed choices and decisions about the risks I take in my daily life and am encouraged to take positive risks which enhance the quality of my life' (HSCS 2.24); and
'My environment is secure and safe' (HSCS 5.19).

This requirement was made on 24 October 2022.

Action taken on previous requirement

All staff worked to ensure the outdoor play areas were safe and secure. A daily checklist, which staff were confident completing, was completed to ensure the outdoor space shared with the school and community was safe and secure. The daily checks of the outdoor space included a check of the physical space for dangerous items or objects, a check of the toilet area as well as a check of the perimeter fence and gate to ensure they were in good working order. Staff were confident of the procedure to follow to report any areas

of concern or damage within the outdoor space. This ensured children experienced care in an environment which was safe.

The manager and staff team were confident reviewing and assessing potential risks within the service. They had reviewed the risk presented by the hot radiator within the indoor play space and taken steps to ensure that children could not access this. Reviewing the risk assessments for both the indoor and outdoor spaces have now been added to the service quality assurance calendar and time has been allocated for the manager to review these collaboratively with staff.

Met - outwith timescales

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

To support children's wellbeing, development needs and progress, being effectively met children's personal plans should be further developed and streamlined. This should include but is not limited to:

- information is accessible to staff and can be clearly shared;
- plans should be reviewed and updated as children's needs, challenges and achievements change, or at least every six months in line with legislation; and
- all staff are knowledgeable about each child's health and wellbeing needs and that tailored care and support strategies are provided and used effectively to meet those needs.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices' (HSCS 1.15); and
'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me' (HSCS 1.19).

This area for improvement was made on 24 October 2022.

Action taken since then
The service has developed a system to ensure that personal planning information is stored securely and is accessible to the staff team whether the children are playing and learning indoors or outdoors. As a result, staff have access to the information they need to effectively meet children's needs.

All personal plans in the service have been regularly reviewed with families at appropriate times. Most strategies for support had been updated and documented to reflect children's needs. However, some changes were not always documented within personal planning information. We reminded the manager and staff to ensure that personal plans were fully completed and contained the most up to date information for children.

Staff spoke confidently and knowledgeably about the individual care needs of children and effectively implemented strategies to support their development and progress. As a result, children received well-planned care and support to meet their individual needs.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

To ensure children's play and learning experiences are relevant and responsive to children's ideas and stage of development the manager should support staff to improve planning processes. This should include but is not limited to:

- recording high quality observations; and
- implementing responsive planning capturing children's ideas and interests.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in a way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity' (HSCS 2.27).

This area for improvement was made on 24 October 2022.

Action taken since then

Staff have looked outwards to develop their observation, planning and assessment cycle within the service. They have visited other services and had some opportunities to reflect and review practice within their own setting. The new 'planning in the moment' approach is in the early stages and the service would benefit from a review of how this approach is working to effectively meet children's needs. The quality of observation of children's learning has improved since the last inspection. Most observations highlighted children's learning through the early level curriculum and included some next steps for development. However, further action needs to be taken to develop planning approaches and the recording of high quality observations to improve experiences for children.

This area for improvement has not been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure children experience high quality care and learning experiences, the manager should improve the quality assurance systems in place. This should include but is not limited to:

- regular and effective support and supervision for all staff;
- regular and effective monitoring of staff practice and quality of children's play and learning experiences; and
- clear and effective plans are in place for maintaining and improving the service with identified timescales and persons responsible.

This is in order to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards, which state that:

'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 24 October 2022.

Action taken since then

Since the last inspection, quality assurance processes had been developed to ensure aspects of the service were routinely monitored. The manager had used a quality assurance calendar to plan and undertake monitoring of the service and provide more effective support and supervision for all staff. Regular formalised monitoring of staff practice and children's experiences had taken place and was linked to the service improvement priorities. As a result, staff were now receiving more regular feedback to understand how to make changes to increase the quality of children's experiences. We spoke with the manager about ensuring this progress is sustained and embedded to support positive outcomes for children.

An improvement plan had been developed in collaboration with staff, which identified key areas for improvement, to ensure there was a shared vision and understanding of the identified areas for action within the service. Most actions from the plan had now been met and the impact of changes were evident. For example, the actions to improve privacy and dignity for children within the outside toilet space had now been implemented, this improved personal care experiences for children outdoors.

This area for improvement has now been met.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good

How good is our setting?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - Good

How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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